



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1080/14794012.2016.1268790](https://doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2016.1268790)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Chin, W. (2017). Anglo American military cooperation in Afghanistan 2001–2014<sup>†</sup>. *JOURNAL OF TRANSATLANTIC STUDIES*, 15, 121–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2016.1268790>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# **Anglo American Military Cooperation in Afghanistan 2001-14**

Warren Chin  
Defence Studies Department  
King's College London  
Joint Services Command and Staff College  
Faringdon Road  
Shrivenham  
SN6 8LA  
Email: [warren.a.chin@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:warren.a.chin@kcl.ac.uk)

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores a paradox. On the one hand it is believed that 9/11 rekindled the UK-US special relationship, but at the same time it has been argued that British mismanagement of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan caused relations to deteriorate. Whilst I agree with part of this analysis in that Iraq represented a nadir in Anglo American relations I believe Afghanistan did not follow this trajectory. A wide range of factors help to explain this change in fortune, but I focus on the role played by the British military in restoring the trust and confidence of its US counterpart and argue that this institutional relationship was and is a vital component in the Anglo American Alliance. <sup>i</sup>

## Introduction

There is in Britain a rich literature on Anglo American relations.<sup>ii</sup> In general these writings have focused on the extent to which the United Kingdom (UK) has enjoyed a special or privileged position of influence with the United States (US) foreign policy making process. Within this context, discussion has centred on such questions as what constitutes a special relationship, when did this relationship begin, why did it assume the character that it did and how do we explain its peaks and troughs. However, underlying much of this debate is a deeper question which concentrates on the perceived decline in the utility of the UK as an ally to the US and what can and should be done to prevent this diminution in status.<sup>iii</sup> This paper touches upon these issues, but within the dynamic setting of the war on terror and specifically Britain's recent intervention in Afghanistan.

Given the overcrowded state of the political and academic market on this topic it is important to justify why yet another piece is required on this subject. I believe analysis of this kind is warranted because the special relationship remains at the heart of the UK's foreign and security policy and will continue to do so in the future<sup>iv</sup>. As such, there are important lessons to be learned from how the alliance operated during the war in Afghanistan. This is important because it might help avoid the problems which it is argued came to plague the special relationship during the war on terror and could do so again in current conflicts involving both the UK and US militarily. This view was expressed most bluntly by Patrick Porter who argued the UK's alliance with the US suffered directly as a consequence of these two conflicts. Instead of reinforcing the special relationship:

*The two wars in the 'war on terror' have had the reverse effect, accelerating a long term process: the eclipse of British power in American eyes. In southern Iraq and now in Afghanistan, the flaws in the special relationship ideology have been underlined and exposed.<sup>v</sup>*

I recognise that problems which served to cause friction between the British and Americans in Iraq also surfaced in the Afghan campaign. Thus, as in Iraq, the British government became deeply concerned about casualties in Afghanistan to the point where one senior British commander claimed that it came to dominate British strategy. He also commented on the lack of equipment the British possessed in both campaigns and their heavy reliance on the US to make up any shortfalls. Indeed, the British were such scavengers that the Americans nicknamed them the 'borrowers'.<sup>vi</sup> Similarly, there were also tensions between the British and Americans over how best to achieve security and stability in Helmand

province where the British were deployed. This tension was clearly illustrated by Wikileaks, which in 2010, revealed that high level US officials in the American embassy in Kabul were critical of British operations in Afghanistan. In these cables it was asserted that the British were not providing sufficient resources to cope with the Taliban in this war. Apparently, Lieutenant General Dan McNeill, ISAF Commander in 2007/08, was said to be dismayed by British efforts and complained they had made a mess of things. In his view their tactics were wrong.<sup>vii</sup> Although more muted in his criticism of British operations in Helmand, US commander, General McChrystal, who took over as ISAF commander in 2009, noted that, although the British increased the number of troops in Helmand dramatically after 2006, this did not stop the Taliban from making inroads into the province. In fact, so strong was their presence that the British were challenged to operate beyond the immediate confines of their fortified bases.<sup>viii</sup> As a result, they struggled to provide security for the Afghan people.

The UK Foreign Affairs Committee in its report of 2010 also acknowledged tensions between the US and UK in the conduct of military operations in Afghanistan, which when added to other areas of dispute brought into question the notion that there was a special relationship.<sup>ix</sup> The passage of time has not served to improve perceptions of these conflicts. For example, in 2015, Sir Christopher Meyer, former British ambassador to the US, asserted that the poor performance of British forces in Iraq and Afghanistan dented the UK's military reputation in the US and was contrasted with the perceived success of the more recent French military intervention in Mali.<sup>x</sup>

However, subsequent analysis of campaign in Afghanistan revealed the emergence of different perspective. As Sherrard Cowper Coles, who was the British Ambassador in Afghanistan from 2007-09, explains in his memoir of his time in Afghanistan:

*If Britain wanted to make a real difference in Afghanistan it could only do so by working with the Americans. And, if we were to influence them, we had to show we were serious, about our military, political and developmental contributions. I believe we did that, above all on the military front.<sup>xi</sup>*

Further evidence of that success was confirmed by Malcolm Chalmers who noted that an important ingredient in the conduct of this war was the quality of the institutional relationship which emerged between the US and UK militaries, a view which challenges the narrative set out by Porter and others.<sup>xii</sup>

Given the legacy of Iraq, and the even more pressing problems which emerged in Afghanistan, it is important to explain why and how the British military were able to achieve

greater cooperation. Certainly these differences in outcome suggest that we need to look beyond a traditional understanding of the special relationship. As such, this paper focuses on how the British and Americans were able to reconstruct their political relationship via their respective military institutions. Whilst it looks at the Afghan campaign in its entirety the main focus is on the period after 2008 when first the UK and then the US undertook to review their strategy in Afghanistan.<sup>xiii</sup> What it reveals is how sentiment and realpolitik at the political/strategic level impacted for good or ill on the day to day working relationship of the UK and US military. However, institutional structures also emerged in Afghanistan which served to facilitate and reconcile the tensions between these allies. The remainder of this paper will briefly explore the state of the debate on Anglo American relations and the extent to which they help us to understand UK-US relations in time of war. The paper will then consider why UK-US relations suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan and this will then be followed by a more detailed analysis of how British and American cooperation improved in the Afghan campaign. I should stress that the lion's share of this paper focuses on the UK perspective of the special relationship. This was a conscious decision based on the recognition that as Burke explains: 'the concept of a "special relationship" is very problematic, in that, in general, it is the weaker power which needs it: the stronger power tends to get what it wants without such supplication.'<sup>xiv</sup>

In essence, special relationships are primarily the preserve of the weaker party, which is why it seemed sensible to focus the debate from the perspective of the UK. One further question that needs to be addressed is why, given the range of relations the UK has with the US have I chosen to focus on defence rather than say intelligence? The answer quite simply is because it is asserted that it is the most important and enduring aspect of the institutional connections linking the UK and US. Certainly this was the view of Baylis, who argued that the defence/security dimension was the defining trait of the Anglo American relationship.<sup>xv</sup> This position was reaffirmed more recently by Wallace and Phillips who assert: 'Defence cooperation was at the heart of the special relationship from the outset, and remains central to it,'<sup>xvi</sup> a view echoed more recently by Dumbrell who stated: 'the British armed forces are one of the main instruments through which the special relationship is symbolised, asserted and measured.'<sup>xvii</sup> Whilst the importance of this domain declined in the benign security environment which emerged in the immediate post cold war era, leading some to declare the end of the special relationship,<sup>xviii</sup> 9/11 put defence firmly back on the agenda. Wyn Rees points out this struggle against terrorism was not solely a military conflict and that it had other important dimensions but the hard edge of military power came to play a dominant role

in the US response and this placed increased importance on the UK's military and strategic assets.<sup>xix</sup>

### **Examining the utility of the existing literature in helping us to understand the dynamics of the UK-US relationship in the post cold war era and war on terror**

In looking at the literature on Anglo American relations, Dobson and Marsh divide this research into two schools of thought: sentimentalists and realists. In their view:

*The former see shared values, culture, democratic principles, and kinship, all leading to habits of cooperation and shared attitudes about how to deal with international issues, as the source and the being of what they conceive of as a special relationship. The latter see shared and overlapping interests forming a utilitarian or functional relationship that will only continue as a special so long as the common interests abide and each side can be of importance to the other.<sup>xx</sup>*

The role of these forces in shaping the special relationship both in the past and present are acknowledged, but it is not clear they explain the shifts that have recently taken place within it during the war on terror. If we look first at the importance of interests, one official in the US Embassy explained in blunt terms that the American relationship with the UK is based on the pursuit of hard interests rather than some vague sentimentality<sup>xxi</sup>. However, it is not certain this provides a cogent explanation of UK-US relations in the post-cold war era. If we look at this within the broader context of the UK's role in NATO it serves to highlight this inconsistency. According to Stephen Walt, alliances are created by states in response to clear external threats. By combining in this way a state can either join a larger potential hegemon or it can seek to ally with other weaker states in the hope this will result in a balance of power between the threatened and threatening state. Viewed in this way, alliances are rational and utilitarian.<sup>xxii</sup> As such, once the threat disappears, as it did with the demise of the Soviet Union, so too should the alliance, in this case NATO.<sup>xxiii</sup> Walt's explanation for the endurance of the alliance rests on the belief that the US was willing to pay a disproportionate share of the costs of NATO in an effort to maintain influence over its allies. Member states benefitted from this transaction because it reduced their national defence costs.<sup>xxiv</sup> This argument rings true, but in an alliance defence is a transnational public good and it is difficult to limit which states benefit from increases in American defence spending.<sup>xxv</sup> This explains why members of the alliance have a vested interest in spending less on defence. However, Walt's argument cannot explain why states like the UK spent

more on defence in the post cold war era than its European counterparts.<sup>xxvi</sup> It also fails to explain why the UK was so willing to put itself in harms way during the war on terror.

The inability of the realists to demonstrate conclusively the relationship between interests and alliances and the oscillations of the UK and US relationship leads us to the second school of thought which focuses on shared language, values and culture and consequently a shared vision of how the world should be governed. Some might interpret this as delusion and Porter, for example, argues that in the UK this is an ideology which was designed to legitimise Britain's preferred international role as a world or pivotal power.<sup>xxvii</sup> However delusional this mind set is, it might help explain why the UK has been willing to assume a greater defence burden in the interests of preserving the special relationship in the past and the present. The problem is, as Dobson and Marsh explain, the sentiment school does not try to theorise the relationship but focuses instead on a wealth of detail to make their case. Their goal, it seems, is to proselytise the virtues of the special relationship without thinking about the costs incurred.<sup>xxviii</sup> Delving more deeply into the sentimental school takes us into the realms of constructivism which assumes the values of societies shape their identities, interests and perceptions of threat. Most important, is the possibility for states to share a common world view as the UK and US are assumed to do.<sup>xxix</sup> However, although this view is persuasive it implies a relationship which is constant over time, but precisely the opposite happened during the war on terror.

In explaining why alliances endure, even when there is no longer a compelling external logic for cooperation between states, Walt also explores the power of transnational institutions like NATO which, over time, create what he terms security communities which share a common vision of how national militaries should operate.<sup>xxx</sup> Liberal institutionalists also argue that international organisations have led to greater cooperation and this resulted in the creation of values and norms which shape the policies of its member states.<sup>xxxi</sup> However, we still come back to the fundamental problem of explaining why only the UK rather than all of NATO assumed the role it did in the war on terror.

It might be that bilateral rather than transnational institutions have an important role to play in explaining the ebb and flow of higher alliance politics. Indeed, Wallace and Phillips argue that the special relationship has two important strands which might help us to better understand the UK's behaviour. The first, and most difficult to measure, describes the historical, cultural and linguistic connections that make the UK-US relationship unique.<sup>xxxii</sup> The second level focuses on the day-to-day aspects of the special relationship and explores the connections between the institutions of the respective states.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This point is reinforced

by Haglund, who argues that an intrinsically important part of the UK and US special relationship is the extent to which it became locked in or institutionalised.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Thus, in his view, although the US and UK enjoyed a *détente* in relations in the second half of the nineteenth century and during the First World War, this friendship remained subject to the vagaries of international and domestic politics and both parties relied instead on a form of sub optimal cooperation in the inter war period. This changed in the Second World War and after 1940 Haglund believes a set of institutional arrangements was put in place that 'would culminate in the two countries becoming what they remain today, two reliable allies between whom an armed conflict simply is taken to be a logical absurdity.'<sup>xxxv</sup>

It is interesting to note that when I spoke to a senior civil servant in MOD he stressed how much importance the British and Americans placed on maintaining strong connections between the MOD and Department of Defence (DOD). To this end the UK sent a small cabal of MOD civil servants to work in DOD and he would meet his counterpart in the US at least once a year to reinforce these bonds.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The UK also has military officers serving in many American military commands and vice versa; it was calculated that in 2013 MOD had 573 of its personnel working in the US.<sup>xxxvii</sup> How then did this institutional connection translate beyond the bureaucracy of MOD and DOD into the field of operations? Neo institutionalism looks closely at how the connections between different national institutions can lead to what is termed institutional isomorphism. This construct challenges the idea that all institutions are competitive and evolve and adapt in a way which should in theory lead to a wide array of differing institutional structures in areas like defence. Instead, they focus on the question why organisations come to look so similar. In the case of defence, the key to understanding this process of homogenisation can be explained by the values and norms of the military profession which have an idealised sense of what an effective and legitimate military organisation should look like, in this case military institutions copy what they perceive to be more successful militaries.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Whilst this does not explain the preferences of a state it does reveal the important linkages between the militaries of different nations and emphasises how a special relationship might become institutionalised. Whilst this can be applied across the western world, in the case of the UK and US military the quality of cooperation achieved during the Second World War and the consolidation of this experience in the Cold War provided a stronger range of institutional linkages. Indeed these linkages are celebrated annually in the Kermit Roosevelt lectures in which senior US and British commanders lecture to a military audience in their ally's country. In sum, understanding Anglo American relations requires us to think in terms of a tripod in which interests, and sentimentality are harnessed institutionally to combine to create something more than a mere alliance. This synergy is explored in the context of the war on terror in the next section.



## The Iraq debacle

The first real tensions in the UK-US relationship in the war on terror surfaced in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq. The British were frustrated by their inability to shape US policy in the post war occupation of the country. For example, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) failed to consult the UK when they decided to disband Iraq's military and instituted de-Ba'athification; a decision which provided a trained pool of manpower for the plethora of insurgent groups which flourished in Iraq after the fall of Saddam's regime.<sup>xxxix</sup> Similarly, the British military became increasingly uneasy about the methods employed by the Americans to pacify and stabilise those areas under US control and concluded there was a connection between American use of force and the rising level of violence amongst the Iraqi people. A number of British observers commented on the relative calm of the British area of occupation called Multi National Division South East (MND SE) compared to the American occupation zone and cited this as evidence of the superiority of the British military in its role as an occupying power.<sup>xl</sup> From the American perspective, tension with their British ally increased as the security problem spread to the British occupation zone. According to several sources, the British military exaggerated their ability to keep south eastern Iraq and Basra quiet, but by 2007 it was increasingly apparent they were losing control of the situation which proved enormously frustrating for the Americans who feared for the security of their line of supply from Kuwait.<sup>xli</sup> This problem was compounded by the divergence in the political and military priorities of the Americans and their British ally. In basic terms, the American operational plan for Iraq changed in 2007 and a concerted effort was made to surge US forces to stabilise a country which seemed on the verge of civil war. In contrast, the British continued to withdraw from Iraq, even though the security situation did not always support such action. Matters came to a head when, in 2008, the Malaki Government launched a major offensive to secure control of Basra, the principal city in what had been the British occupation zone. This attack was conducted with the support of US forces, but it is claimed the British were not consulted and it was inferred by the media that this snub demonstrated how frustrated the Americans were with their British military counterparts.<sup>xlii</sup> It is important to note that British military commanders in Iraq during this time have challenged this view<sup>xliii</sup>, but evidence from other sources suggests US frustration with the British was not simply a product of the febrile imagination of the media.<sup>xliv</sup> Ironically, the British military's urgency to exit Iraq was caused in part by the escalation in its commitment to the war in Afghanistan which began with the deployment of 3,000 troops to Helmand in 2006. The next

section focuses on Afghanistan and explores the latent and actual tensions which emerged in the political and military domain of this war.

### Centrifugal Forces which impacted on the UK-US Special Relationship in Afghanistan

The debate over Iraq set out above illustrates a general problem which characterises any deliberation on the special relationship: how do you provide a metric which allows more than an impressionistic measure of its peaks and troughs. Looking at this issue in the context of a war does however provide a partial solution to this problem as the principal issues and debates often assume a more tangible form because there is so much more at stake for each ally. For example, we can determine how far the political goals of the allies in war converge or not. Similarly, we can also assess the extent to which there is common agreement and understanding on how military power is to be employed to achieve the goals of this war. Finally, war often helps crystallise our thoughts regarding the risks accepted by each ally and the costs they are willing to pay to ensure strategic success.

If we apply this metric to Iraq we can see there was a strong agreement on the political aims of the war, but apparently some concern within the UK over the post war reconstruction plan and the subsequent way in which the US used its military power to stabilise Iraq and restore national governance. Similarly, whilst willing to take the lead for security and development in MND SE, the British proved unwilling to increase the risks they faced by deploying forces to assist their American ally in more violent parts of the country and even in MND SE casualties became an increasingly sensitive political issue in the UK.<sup>xlv</sup>

Interestingly, exactly the same pattern emerged in the war in Afghanistan. For example, at the political level, there was a strong convergence between the US and UK over the justification for war in 2001 and what they wanted to achieve. From the perspective of the British they could legitimately claim they had an important stake in this war as 67 British civilians were killed by Al Qaeda's attacks on 9/11. Indeed a statement made by the Foreign Affairs Committee made clear, British involvement in this war stemmed just as much from a sense of moral right as national interest:

*The events of 11 September demonstrated clearly that a narrow definition of "national interest" is no longer sufficient. The international terrorist threat from organisations such as al Qaeda may be directed most immediately against the United States, but such attacks affect British interests and security, and may in future be directed against the United Kingdom. .<sup>xlvi</sup>*

The war against terrorism is an unplanned and unsought conflict. But when the first hijacked airliner struck the World Trade Center, war became necessary and, once entered upon, war must be pursued vigorously and with all appropriate means.<sup>xlvii</sup>

According to the Foreign Affairs Committee, the UK government's objectives shaped the early stages of the war against international terrorism.<sup>xlviii</sup> This appears to have extended into the preparations for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). President Bush, declared the US's goals were as follows: the destruction of terrorist training camps and associated infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al Qaeda's leadership and the ending of all terrorist activity within Afghanistan and bringing about the downfall of the Taliban. In giving evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2001, the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, made clear these objectives had been formulated by both the UK and US governments. As he explained:

*The policy guiding the use of UK military assets in OEF was set by President Bush and our Prime Minister, Tony Blair in terms of the overall objectives of this military action which are, as you know, to bring Osama bin Laden and his key associates to justice or justice to him, to break up completely the al-Qaeda terrorist network, and because the Taliban refuse to cooperate to break up the Taliban as well. That is the policy.*<sup>xlix</sup>

As in Iraq, there was a strong political consensus on the need to remove a specific threat, but important political differences emerged as the campaign went into the post conflict phase. This difference of opinion was summed up succinctly by Kampfner who said: 'to the Americans, the question of staying in Afghanistan for the duration was secondary. To Blair it was vital.' During the Labour Conference in 2001, Blair had declared: "We will not walk away from Afghanistan, as the outside world has done so many times before".<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, for the British, it was vital to address the social and economic ills that existed in Afghanistan in an attempt to remove the permissive conditions which gave rise to the emergence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. A mix of motivations played out here. First and most important Blair needed to sell the war in Afghanistan to his own party which was largely hostile to Bush's unilateral foreign policy. Although 9/11 caused this criticism to become more muted it was not long before many within the Labour party questioned Bush's

approach to the war and Blair's desire to support the US at any price. Second, was his commitment to a humanitarian agenda.<sup>li</sup>

A good illustration of this tension between the Americans and British can be seen in the discussions which took place on the subject of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which came into existence in early 2002. In general, there was broad agreement on the need to stabilise and reconstruct Afghanistan and remove any ungoverned space which Al Qaeda might exploit, but important divisions emerged between the UK and US over the size, composition and role of this peacekeeping force. The British strongly supported the creation of a force of about 25,000 troops to secure all the principal cities in the country. They also offered to take charge until another nation could be found to act as the lead nation. The American position acknowledged the need for a peacekeeping force but, because of an innate hostility to the use of US troops in nation building and peacekeeping, they preferred other nations to take on this role.<sup>lii</sup> However, in the case of Afghanistan, their hostility also extended to the deployment of any peacekeeping force beyond Kabul. The British commander of the first ISAF mission, Lt Gen Jon McColl, drew up a plan which demonstrated how the ISAF mission could be expanded, but he claims he was ordered to stop these preparations by the British government because Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary, refused to sanction this action. It seems the only reason why the Americans were prepared to authorise ISAF's footprint in Kabul was because they recognised the need to support the new Afghan government under Hamid Karzai and that, if this was to happen, security needed to be provided so the bureaucracy could function properly and safely. It would also ensure political leaders from all factions would come to Kabul.<sup>liii</sup>

For the Americans their overriding goal was to kill or capture Osama bin Laden and as many of his fighters as possible. As such, the collapse of the Taliban merely facilitated the achievement of this goal. Having peacekeepers deployed across Afghanistan could get in the way of their counterterrorist campaign. Their second goal was not to repeat the military mistakes made by the Soviets and become embroiled in a long and protracted occupation of the country.<sup>liv</sup> Thus, even though the Taliban leadership fled to Pakistan in early December 2001, the US military continued to conduct large scale operations to sweep up the remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban which remained trapped in the country; hence operations like Tora Bora and Anaconda. Thereafter they relied on a combination of special forces and local warlords to support them in their pursuit of Al Qaeda.<sup>lv</sup> Eventually a compromise over

ISAF was agreed and a force of 5,000 peacekeepers under the leadership of the British was allowed to deploy in Kabul, but their mandate did not extend beyond the city. So determined were the Americans to keep ISAF and OEF separate that a British request to deploy the British ISAF contingent under OEF command was politely but firmly declined.<sup>lvi</sup>

The British chose not to challenge the US on this issue because they realised their ally was shifting the focus of its military machine to Iraq. Obviously the British chose to support what many subsequently believed was the biggest strategic blunder in the war on terror - the decision to invade Iraq<sup>lvii</sup>, but they remained engaged in the development of Afghanistan via their involvement in reconstruction and development in Kabul and in the north of the country. Most important, the UK played a leading role in getting the international community to invest in Afghanistan and, as a result of the London Compact in 2006, promised to provide \$800 million in aid as part of a five year development plan. The UK's commitment to the humanitarian agenda was clearly demonstrated because it was the second most generous aid donor to Afghanistan after the United States.<sup>lviii</sup>

This benign strategic status quo came to an end as the US found itself militarily over extended in Iraq. Confronted by a resource challenge caused by fighting two wars simultaneously it became necessary to call upon its allies to take on a heavier burden in Afghanistan whilst it sought to stabilise Iraq. Of central importance in the proposed expansion of allied forces in Afghanistan was the employment of a substantial British contingent of troops in Helmand. Sadly, once the UK agreed to expand its military commitment in Afghanistan the same challenges which faced the British in Iraq emerged in Helmand. The underlying problem was how to achieve an equitable distribution of cost, benefit and risk between allied forces, which according to Cimbala represented a new challenge in the game of burden sharing in NATO.<sup>lix</sup>

One of the most important aspects of the campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq was the way in which states pursued what might be termed negative as well as positive goals. These former objectives were undeclared and yet promoted the interests of a national government above the needs of its allies or indeed the achievement of the strategic goals of the campaign. Usually these negative goals were articulated through the use of national caveats and were identified as one of the most difficult problems facing the ISAF commander in terms of being able to manoeuvre his forces. Apparently over 70 different caveats needed to be taken into account by the ISAF commander when planning an operation.<sup>lx</sup> Typically the use of national caveats arose where there was a perceived imbalance between the interests of the national

government and actual and potential costs of the operation they were being asked to support.<sup>lxi</sup>

Had the Helmand plan gone as hoped and the British left after three years without firing a single shot then this issue might not have raised its ugly head in Afghanistan. But instead of deploying into a semi permissive environment, the task force quickly became engaged in a ferocious battle with the Taliban. The fighting in Helmand, post 2006, was so severe it was estimated that British troops fighting in this province faced three times as many attacks as other NATO forces in the next most violent province of Kandahar.<sup>lxii</sup> Not surprisingly then the same kind of strategic and operational tensions which characterised Anglo American military cooperation in Iraq also arose in Afghanistan. Once the severity of this threat was understood by the British government it induced a sense of caution in terms of the conduct of their campaign and these negative goals came to the fore.

A British general who served in Kabul believes preservation of the British military contingent in Afghanistan came to dominate government thinking on the war. If you compared the UK and US political objectives for this campaign on the surface there was strong agreement on what needed to be done, but in reality the British had another agenda. In the case of the American political and military establishment, by the time you got to the latter stages of the campaign the goal focused on how to use military power to achieve a favourable political settlement locally and how the use of force impacted on the wider war regionally and even globally. Viewed in this way, the US military were trying to think operationally and strategically about the conduct of this war. In contrast, the UK government thought only about its forces in Helmand province and quite often this zoomed in on the strategically important town of Sangin where over 100 British soldiers had been killed. He notes that at a meeting between the Prime Minister and US President on Afghanistan, the British kept raising the plight of their forces in Sangin, but unfortunately the American President had not been briefed on this subject as the meeting was supposed to be about strategic issues. In his view, the British government's primary concern was to avoid casualties which caused them to think only in tactical terms. This had an important impact on the British military and limited the extent to which they could cooperate with their American counterparts. This was most clearly reflected in the way in which the chain of command operated. In simple terms, once the British deployed combat forces to Helmand in 2006 the brigade commander became the national contingent commander and was therefore responsible for looking after UK interests. As a result, although there was a NATO/ISAF chain of command the most important command chain for the British brigade commander was the one which was located

in the UK Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) and the Chief of the Defence Staff. This ensured the UK government maintained a tight rein on the conduct of UK military operations.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Given the similarities between Iraq and Afghanistan why didn't we see a similar deterioration in Anglo American military and political relations in this latter conflict? Indeed, it would seem there was greater potential for squabbling between the two allies in Afghanistan because this operation took place in the shadow of Iraq and it is claimed shaped American attitudes towards the British.<sup>lxiv</sup> At the strategic level there were also profound differences between the US and UK on other aspects of the war. For example there were tensions on how to conduct counter narcotics and the eradication of poppy cultivation.<sup>lxv</sup> The UK took the lead on tackling the opium industry in Afghanistan, but its actions seemed to exacerbate rather than resolve the problem. Its policy in 2002 was to compensate farmers for eradication of their opium crops, but this backfired and led to a dramatic increase in poppy cultivation.<sup>lxvi</sup> In addition landowners failed to distribute the compensation paid for eradication to smaller farmers and this caused resentment towards the Afghan government. As a result, the policy was abandoned in the first year and both the British and Americans moved towards a strategy of eradication and interdiction of the crop. But overall, the UK's policy of eradication failed to prevent a dramatic increase in opium production which rose from 1000 tons in 2001 to over 6000 tons by 2006. This caused considerable frustration within the US government and calls for it to step in and take the lead. One solution put forward within the American government was to employ aerial crop spraying, a development which the UK government opposed<sup>lxvii</sup>. In truth, aerial eradication also proved to be a divisive issue within the Bush administration, but in late 2007 the National Security Council (NSC), authorised its use.<sup>lxviii</sup>

This failure was reinforced as the war against the Taliban expanded and it became clear they were deriving a significant income from the sale of opium. At the same time, in an effort to prevent the alienation of local farmers in southern Afghanistan, British, Canadians and Dutch commanders were accused of failing to eradicate this crop, even though the policy was sanctioned by the Afghan government. In contrast, the US military agreed in 2004 to expand its mission to include interdiction of opium trafficking but left the task of eradication to the State Department.<sup>lxix</sup> Most importantly from the perspective of the resolution of the war were the discussions between the British and Americans over the Taliban. The British maintained that an important part of long term conflict resolution in Afghanistan required the Afghan government to open negotiations with the Taliban, a position which was opposed by the Americans until late in the war.<sup>lxx</sup>

As in Iraq questions were also raised about the different strategic cultures of UK and US forces and how this might cause friction in Afghanistan.<sup>lxxi</sup> These suspicions seemed to be confirmed almost as soon as the British deployed into Helmand in 2006. As the British Brigade commander of the time noted there was a contradiction in terms of what the British were trying to do in terms of generating local security and stability in Helmand and US military special forces which were also operating in the same area and conducting counterterrorism operations.<sup>lxxii</sup> This had the negative effect of undermining what the British were doing as US counter terror operations caused inadvertent civilian casualties, which the British were then blamed for causing, and which undermined their efforts to win the hearts and minds of the people. For example, in September 2006, a company of Fusiliers witnessed an attack by an AC 130 Gunship in support of a US special forces in an area just outside Now Zad which resulted in civilian casualties and violent protest which they were forced to deal with. Even in summer 2007, a commander in Sangin requested that US special forces operating in his district should be removed because they were having a damaging effect on the British hearts and minds campaign.<sup>lxxiii</sup> There was also a clash between US and UK commanders in 2006 which caused US Major General, Ben Freakley to threaten to 'knock British Brigadier Ed Butler's lights out'. The cause of this incident was the decision made by Butler to deviate from the agreed plan and respond to the request of the Afghan government to prevent the fall of northern Helmand to the Taliban. It is interesting to note that Butler was deeply critical of Freakley's frustration which he believed revealed a lack of understanding of the challenges of higher command. This he attributed to the lack of experience US senior officers had in irregular wars where political considerations frequently dominated military logic.<sup>lxxiv</sup> In sum, Afghanistan seemed to be even more of a 'minefield' for UK-US relations than Iraq.

### **Centripetal Forces which sustained alliance cohesion in Afghanistan**

What then happened in Afghanistan which allowed a closer and more effective working relationship between the UK and US military? In my view the elements that made up the special relationship provided a permissive environment within which to engender a close working alliance in both Iraq and Afghanistan, but a specific sequence of events helped bring this to the fore in the latter conflict. In essence, a catalyst was created which allowed the British to exploit the generic benefits of the special relationship in Kabul and Helmand. The first point I would make here is that the intangibles of the special relationship, which



focus on a sense of shared history, understanding of the US and most importantly language, did play a part in helping the UK to make itself indispensable to the US in Afghanistan. However, as one British Colonel explained, whilst this facilitated and eased social relations in a US dominated chain of command it did not guarantee influence. This required British officers to demonstrate their competence as staff officers or in the field of operations, depending on where they were deployed. In his view, the British usually excelled because, in contrast to their American counterparts, their training was diverse and comprehensive. This stemmed not from some innate martial superiority of the British but from the fact that, because the British army was so small, its officer corps could not role specialise in the way US army officers could. In sum, British officers possessed a good understanding of formation level planning as a whole and this enabled them to demonstrate their value in a large headquarters.

In addition, he also believed the British were careful when choosing their posts in the US chain of command.<sup>lxxv</sup> Thus, even though in the later stages of the war in Helmand, the British provided one third of the force, they accounted for only 15-20% of posts in the regional command headquarters. However, these posts allowed the British to maintain influence in an American dominated chain of command.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Obviously, these observations can be extended to the British military's time in Iraq and this suggests that, whilst these connections gave the British a comparative advantage, they were not enough to sustain the military relationship. However, other factors discussed below served to increase the importance of both these elements of UK US military cooperation in Afghanistan.

There were three important differences in terms of how the UK US alliance was managed in Afghanistan which I believe made a fundamental difference in terms of countering centrifugal forces present in Afghanistan. The first and most important was the fact that, in contrast to Iraq, the British were not looking to withdraw from Afghanistan but rather to expand their role in this campaign. As such, the UK investment in Helmand escalated rapidly with a threefold increase in the number of troops in theatre by 2009. Similarly the £3 billion estimated cost to conduct the operation over three years stood at nearly £14.5 billion by 2010.<sup>lxxvii</sup> This apparently sent the right signals and impressed the Americans that the UK was doing more than posturing.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Certainly in the time of the Bush Administration its focus was on Iraq and the British deployment allowed them to concentrate on that problem. In contrast, the Obama Administration was forced to deal immediately with Afghanistan and sanctioned a surge of American forces into the country in an effort to stabilise the situation. Again the UK remained

a vital component in this new strategy. It was not simply the material and manpower provided by the UK, but also where they were located which enhanced their importance. Although only one percent of the Afghan population lived in Helmand it became the principal frontline in this war. As a result, the British had a prominent position in U.S. strategy. Equally important, the level of the threat in Helmand meant that the British were automatically exposed to a high degree of risk and required help from their allies. Of particular importance here is how the UK's sacrifices compared to those of its NATO/ISAF allies. A persistent cause of friction between the US and its allies was the belief that America was bearing the burden of this war virtually alone.<sup>lxxix</sup> However, the US military also recognised 'that the UK, Dutch and Canadians had carried the brunt of the fight in the south' with no support from nations like Germany or France.<sup>lxxx</sup> In contrast, in Iraq the British were in a relatively benign zone of occupation, but were constantly being asked to reinforce US forces involved in heavy fighting elsewhere. As has been said, such requests were politely declined and inevitably this became a source of friction.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

The second important development was the recognition that, after seven years of war, ISAF still had no strategy for achieving their political objectives in Afghanistan. As Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff put it: 'In Afghanistan, we do what we can.' In Iraq, we do what we must.<sup>lxxxii</sup> One of the first actions of the new Obama Presidency in 2009 was to address this deficiency. What followed was important, not simply because it averted disaster in the short term, but, more importantly, because of the impact this had on the US and UK alliance. For example, at the highest political level the British believed they made an important contribution to the US strategic review of Afghanistan and, as a result, a consensus emerged on what needed to be done, a process which was largely absent in the later stages of the Iraq campaign.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of this was the recognition on both sides of the Atlantic that any strategy for Afghanistan also had to include Pakistan.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

The introduction of a military strategy or operational campaign plan created greater unity of effort within the coalition in that there was now a plan. Most importantly, the British military supported this plan because it conformed to what they believed needed to be done in Afghanistan which was a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy supported by a surge of NATO troops. Indeed, both American and British military staff training and education focused on preparing officers to understand and become skilled at campaigning at the operational level and so it was not surprising that the British military were willing to support this innovation. In addition, the British were also strong admirers of American counterinsurgency as it evolved in the latter stages of the Iraq campaign and whilst the

British army had its own COIN manual it still required its officers to read and understand US COIN doctrine as captured in FM 3-24. Thus, according to the House of Commons Defence Committee, the new COIN strategy employed by the Americans in Afghanistan under McChrystal was a continuation of what the UK had already been doing in Afghanistan, but this had been badly under resourced.<sup>lxxxv</sup> .

As important were structural and procedural changes which took place within the theatre of operations, which provided a mechanism through which to implement the new plan. In addition it also served to reanimate the conceptual and institutional linkages between the UK and US military. In 2009 ISAF was composed of 42 nations which together deployed 61,000 troops within five regional commands. In addition, there were a further 57,000 US troops fighting under a different chain of command within OEF<sup>lxxxvi</sup>. All of these elements were fighting their own separate wars and consequently one of the basic maxims of war was not followed, i.e. the need to link tactical actions to achieve strategic effect. The absence of a higher authority above the regional commands allowed the British, for example, to subvert ISAF orders when they conflicted with UK objectives such as the need to avoid UK casualties.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

In an attempt to address this deficiency, the Americans created the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) which was empowered to coordinate the five Afghan regional commands<sup>lxxxviii</sup>. A more difficult challenge, which took several months to resolve, was bringing the USMC, which deployed into Helmand in 2009, and US Special Forces who served under OEF under the operational control of the ISAF commander.<sup>lxxxix</sup> The ability of RC South, under which the British Task Force Helmand (TFH) was initially subordinated, was also enhanced with the deployment of a UK divisional headquarters in November 2009. This formation had been raised in 2007 and reflected the need for a higher formation to direct and coordinate the various forces operating within southern Afghanistan.<sup>xc</sup> The need for such higher level direction was amplified with the deployment of 20,000 US Marines into Helmand. It is claimed that frictions quickly emerged between US and UK forces operating in Helmand over resources and missions.<sup>xcj</sup> In this case, the UK divisional headquarters was able to limit the freedom of action of national contingents and impose some order on brigade commanders. Certainly in the case of the British brigade commander his freedom of action was far more limited than that experienced by his predecessors and instead of creating his own plan of operations he now worked to a concept of operations designed in Kabul and or RC South. This also resulted indirectly in a reduction in the political clout exerted by the brigade commander, especially as RC South was also commanded by a British general in

2009-10. It was hoped that at the very least this set up would cause the actions of the brigade commander to be tempered by the wisdom and experience of the divisional commander.<sup>xcii</sup>

The political power of the Brigade commander was further diluted by the enhancement of the role of Deputy Commander ISAF, which was a post allocated to the British. It seems that the UK Chief of the Defence Staff, General Richards, wanted to increase British influence in Kabul and ensure greater harmony was achieved in terms of US and UK military planning. Consequently, General Nick Parker was appointed to the post, but was also made national contingent commander, which in theory meant he and not the Brigadier in Helmand would represent the view of the British government. This change allowed the army to make more nuanced judgments when trying to protect the interests of the UK and it was hoped that, because of the greater experience and seniority of the Deputy Commander and the remit of his post, he could achieve a better balance between US and UK interests in a way that did not damage the special relationship. This change had an important bearing on the quality of the UK's alliance with the Americans and it was noted that in the case of Iraq the unwillingness of the British to become integrated in the US chain of command in Baghdad was cited as a reason why the relationship soured to the extent that it did.<sup>xciii</sup> In truth, General Parker struggled in this role. In his view, there was a lack of understanding of the theatre strategic level and in particular the decision making process in Kabul. As result, his ability to act as a national contingent commander was handicapped by a lack of resources. Only in Kabul could the British hope to shape the campaign but too much attention was focused on Helmand.<sup>xciv</sup>

The importance of the institutional dimension of the special relationship in Afghanistan was challenged to some extent as Task Force Helmand came under the command of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) in RC South West.<sup>xcv</sup> This created an interesting test for the British military in that it had little experience of cooperating with American marines. It is also clear that at the start of this friendship the British struggled to comprehend the nature of the USMC. As one senior British commander commented:

*It took some time and a lot of effort to work out how the USMC functioned. In this case, the command and control function, the processes, right down to the basics of what do they expect, how do you bid for resources, how to play the game; play by their rules of their game rather than our own. We got very good at it; we were outperforming our counterparts in Task Force Leatherneck when it came to bidding for resources or submitting CONOPS.<sup>xcvi</sup>*

This statement downplays the initial frictions that emerged between the British military and the USMC as they deployed into Helmand. The USMC was openly critical at the perceived lack of progress made by the British in Helmand and their failure to deliver on promises made to the people in terms of reconstruction and development. The Americans were also appalled at how the Afghan military was segregated from their British counterparts on UK bases. Tensions also emerged in the marines' first operation to push into Nawa, Garmser and Khan Neshin, The British did not see the point of pushing into a sparsely populated part of Helmand. But marine commanders believed it was important to show they were carrying out the wishes of the provincial governor.<sup>xcvii</sup> For their part, the British were critical of the aggressiveness shown by the USMC in their efforts to stabilise and secure those districts under their control, which it was claimed was making the insurgency worse. In response US marine commanders accused the British of appeasing the Taliban which was why they were able to exist in relative peace in other districts of the province. The British were also anxious that the handover of Sangin and Musa Qala, two of the most violent areas in Helmand, to the USMC resembled their withdrawal from Basra and this too became a source of tension.<sup>xcviii</sup>

How then do we explain the close interaction that emerged between two military institutions? Sentiment seems to have played some part in this. It is claimed that an important factor in improving relations between these two forces was the realisation amongst American commanders of the sacrifices made by the British and the burden they carried; so, for example, although the British had 30 percent of the troops in Helmand, they were responsible for 70 percent of the population. The British also suffered higher casualties than their American counterparts, a point highlighted by the UK task force commander in a meeting with the USMC in 2010. There was also a concern that as British casualties mounted in 2009 domestic political support for the war in the UK was falling away and something needed to be done to reverse this trend. Interestingly, the sensitivity of this issue was brought home to American political advisor, Kael Weston, in a meeting with UK foreign secretary David Milliband who asked the Americans to help relieve the pressure on the British. In response Weston sent a memo titled 'US-UK relations at a crossroads'. In this communication he advised that the US needed to ease the UK out of the toughest parts of Helmand. US ambassador Karl Eikenberry referred this request to Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, who agreed this should be done.<sup>xcix</sup>

According to a British officer who served in the USMC headquarters in Helmand, the British army and the USMC, in spite of the problems alluded to earlier, actually had much in

common. Both were small and agile formations and this provided a common bond from which it was possible to build a shared understanding of what needed to be done. He described the relationship between the British army and USMC as awesome. Both institutions and personality played a key role in making things work and as a senior staff officer he felt absolutely empowered and did not feel he had an American minder looking over his shoulder. In fact the relationship was so successful that the British army looked at ways in which to maintain contact with the USMC post Afghanistan. In the end this aspiration was allowed to wither as it became clear that in the future they were more likely to work with the US army than marines.<sup>c</sup> It is also possible to argue that, even though there was little in the way of formal connections between the British army and the USMC, their training and education did provide a degree of connectivity and a common ground for cooperation in that they followed similar training and educational programmes, which allowed close cooperation with the US army.

Another important reason why UK US military cooperation worked so well in Helmand was because of the investment made in training with the USMC. In the view of one British officer training was more important than any long standing institutional connection. He found the pre deployment training he did with the Americans before going to Afghanistan extremely important. It ensured you understood the American planning system and battle rhythm of the 400 staff in RC South West.<sup>ci</sup> A large number of British staff officers did the training before deploying but some did not and, in his view, those who did not struggled to get into this working rhythm. One of the problems which made it difficult to provide this level of training more widely was that British policy is for soldiers to do 6 month tours. This stipulation limits how much training can be done before being deployed. In addition personnel tend not to be identified until near the time of their deployment. Shortage of time thus limited how long they could spend on training if they were going to do a six month tour. Finally, the British army gapped posts for officers of the rank of lieutenant colonel and below, which meant unit commanders were reluctant to release staff until the very last minute. He was unusual in that he had disbanded his regiment and then had several months free before going to Afghanistan. This allowed him to go to the US for longer than normal and to commit to serving in Afghanistan for twelve months. He also pointed out that, although both the UK and US are close allies and members of NATO there still existed significant security walls between US and UK forces and it took time to sort out security clearances. This has become extremely important in an age when everything is done on computer and he believed the UK should maintain a pool of officers with the necessary clearances to work in a US headquarters in the future. This problem was particularly acute in the domain of tactical and operational intelligence.

A certain synergy also emerged between the USMC and UK forces over the four years of their deployment in Helmand. As a result, a high degree of integration was achieved in even the most sensitive areas of activity between the British and Americans. Perhaps the best illustration of this was the decision to combine the US and UK targeting cells, which existed to provide intelligence on insurgent activity. This capability relied heavily on the generation of information capabilities which states and militaries sometimes do not want to share with even their closest ally. However it became logical to combine rather than duplicate this activity in Helmand, and whilst it still took six months to bring about this merger a combined targeting cell was created. This was cited as evidence of how closely integrated the British and Americans became in Helmand. <sup>cii</sup>

Whilst the effort made to promote greater unity of command within RC South and then RC South West reduced the autonomy of the British it did address an important source of friction. As has been said, the principal difference between UK and US relations in Afghanistan compared to Iraq was that the British were prepared to integrate themselves in a US chain of command. It is also important to recognise that the creation of unified command structure was not a silver bullet and it seems PJHQ continued to be a thorn in the side of the US led chain of command in RC South West and the problem of national politics did not go away. However, having British officers serving as deputy commander ISAF, deputy commander IJC and deputy commander of RC South West provided a filter through which requests from PJHQ and the American chain of command could be transmitted in a way that was more measured and balanced. Of particular importance here was the willingness of the national contingent commander to conduct a more equal dialogue with London regarding some of their requests.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay I have looked at the special relationship largely through the eyes of the British. It has set out, but not challenged the basic assumptions that have shaped and driven UK foreign policy on this subject over many decades. My main goal has been to explore how the British sought to sustain this relationship within the demanding environment of the war on terror. Of particular interest here is the way in which the cohesion of the alliance oscillated between Iraq and Afghanistan. Within this context I have challenged the notion that, like Iraq, the war in Afghanistan caused significant harm to the alliance. In my view, although the alliance in Afghanistan experienced many of the same problems as Iraq, the relationship did

not follow the same trajectory. If this proposition is accepted we then need to explain this variation. In my view, whilst I accept sentiment and interest played a part in shaping UK-US relations the fact that both variables had a constant presence over the span of the war on terror suggests the cause of this variation is to be found elsewhere. An important difference between Iraq and Afghanistan was extent to which the allies institutionalised their relations within the campaign. What allowed the benefits of this association to flourish in Afghanistan rather than Iraq was the joint commitment by the UK and US to the successful conclusion of this war by 2014. Equally important, and again in contrast to Iraq, there was an agreement between the US and British militaries on the best strategy and operational plan to achieve this goal, a view which drew heavily on a common training and education in the UK and US and which allowed the British to work harmoniously with the USMC, a formation it had little contact with until they deployed to Helmand in 2008. As important was the willingness of the British to subordinate their forces within a US chain of command, something which existed only on paper in Iraq. This became possible in Afghanistan because there was a military consensus on how to win. Although, subordinate British commanders ensured they retained influence and could act as a filter which allowed them to manage American expectations regarding what British troops could do and the UK government's expectations that they do nothing that might entail British casualties. In essence, we went from a position of zero sum gain in Iraq to one of gainshare in Afghanistan or at least an approximation of this. This reinforces Haglund's point: the special relationship needs more than sentiment or interest to sustain its cohesion especially when dealing with the stresses of war. Intuitively, both the British and American militaries understood this in 1940 when they set up an entirely new allied organisational apparatus to plan and run the war, but in spite of decades of cooperation, both needed to relearn this lesson on a more modest scale in the war on terror.

Finally, if we accept the proposition that the British military succeeded in its mission of redeeming itself in the eyes of its most important ally in Afghanistan we also need to assess the extent to which this allowed the UK to shape or influence US policy. Such thinking is, in part, an historical legacy stemming from the Second World War and, in particular, the success of the British at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 where they got their more powerful ally to commit to a grand strategy which suited British rather than American interests.<sup>ciii</sup> However, the example of Iraq in 2002-03 suggests that it is unsafe to assume that, because a state makes a significant military contribution to an ally's campaign, this automatically translates into political influence over that ally.<sup>civ</sup> However, it is interesting how such thinking persists. The quote by Sherard Cowper-Coles at the start of this essay provides proof of that. It is also interesting that in evidence given to the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2011, journalist James Ferguson, asserted that, as the second largest



contributor to the war in Afghanistan, the UK was in a better position than any US ally to shape American policy. Indeed the US has recently stressed how important the size and capacity of UK defence is in sustaining its position as a key ally.<sup>cv</sup> But, in the case of Afghanistan, having reflected on this linkage, Cowper Coles concluded at the end of his memoir that perhaps the only tangible evidence of British influence over US policy was that it accelerated the willingness of the US to accept that a political settlement in Afghanistan required that the Afghan government talk to the Taliban; a process which was difficult to sell to the American electorate because of the perceived connection between the Taliban, Al Qaeda and 9/11.<sup>cvi</sup> But he also points out that the US would have arrived at this conclusion eventually and that the most the UK could claim was that it speeded up this process of deliberation.<sup>cvi</sup> Consequently, although the British military relationship with its American counterpart did improve it is not clear this significantly enhanced the influence of the UK government in Washington or Kabul. At best it helped to stabilise relations between the US and UK and reversed its downward trajectory.

## References

---

<sup>i</sup> The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the official policy or views of the British government.

<sup>ii</sup> See RB Mowatt, *The Diplomatic Relations of Great Britain and the United States* (London: Edward Arnold, 1925); LM Gelber, *The Rise of the Anglo American Friendship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); HC Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo American Relations 1783-1952* ((London: Odhams Press, 1954. See C. Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War Against Japan* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979); CJ Bartlett, *The Special Relationship: A Political History of Anglo American Relations since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992) JW Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo American Relations in the Cold War and After*, (London: Macmillan, 2001), J Baylis, *Anglo American Defence Relations 1939-1984*; I. Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship: Britain's Deterrent and America: 1957-62* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); D. Reynolds, 'A Special Relationship? America, Britain and the International Order Since the Second World War', *International Affairs* 62:1 1985/86.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Baylis, *Anglo American Defence Relations 1939-80* (London: Macmillan, 1981), xiv.

<sup>iv</sup> See HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, (London: TSO, 2010), 59.

<sup>v</sup> P.Porter, 'Last Charge of the Knights: Iraq, Afghanistan and the Special Relationship,' *International Affairs* 86:2 (March 2010), 357.

<sup>vi</sup> Interview with senior British Army Commander May 2014.

<sup>vii</sup> See Jon Boone, 'Wikileaks cables expose Afghan contempt for British military', *The Guardian* 2 December 2010

<sup>viii</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir*, (New York, Penguin, 2014), Kindle edition, Loc 320-321.

<sup>ix</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, HC 114, (London: TSO, 2010).

<sup>x</sup> Sir Christopher Meyer, 'Our Special Relationship hangs by a thread', *The Daily Telegraph* 15 January 2015.

<sup>xi</sup> Sherard Cowper Coles, *Cables From Kabul: The inside story of the West's Afghanistan campaign* (London: Harper Collins, 2009), Kindle edition loc 4764.

<sup>xii</sup> M. Chalmers, *Foreign Affairs Committee* HC 114, (2010) Evidence 108.

<sup>xiii</sup> See The UK Cabinet Office, *UK Policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (London: TSO, 2009) and Ewen MacAskill, 'Obama sets out a new strategy for Afghanistan war', *The Guardian* 27March 2009.

- 
- <sup>xiv</sup> K Burk, 'Old world, new world: Great Britain and America from the beginning', in *America's Special Relationships' Foreign and Domestic Aspects of the Politics of Alliance* edited by J Dumbrell and A Schafer, (London: Routledge, 2009), 24.
- <sup>xv</sup> John Balylis (1981), xii.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Wallace and Phillips, 'Reassessing the special relationship', *International Affairs* 85:2 (2009), 267.
- <sup>xvii</sup> See J. Dumbrell, 'The US-UK "Special Relationship" in a World Twice Transformed' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17:3 (October 2004), 437-450.
- <sup>xviii</sup> See C. Coker, 'The Special Relationship in the 1990s', *International Affairs* 68:3, 1992; A Danchev, *On Specialness: Essays in Anglo American Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1998) and J. Dickie, *Special No More: Anglo American Relations Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Weidenfield, 1994):
- <sup>xix</sup> See Wyn Rees, *Transatlantic – Counter Terrorism Cooperation The New Imperative* (London: Routledge, 2006), 128.
- <sup>xx</sup> A. Dobson and S. Marsh, *Anglo American Relations: Contemporary Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge), 3.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Interview with US official from US Embassy in London, 7 July 2014.
- <sup>xxii</sup> S. Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,' *Survival*, 39:1 (1997), 157.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,' *International Security* 15:4 (summer 1990), 5-56.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Walt, (1997), 164-65
- <sup>xxv</sup> S. Cimbala and P.K. Forster, 'Multinational Military Intervention: NATO Policy, Strategy and Burden Sharing (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 14-16.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> The US accounts for 46% of NATO defence spending and the UK is second highest contributor accounting for 7% of alliance defence expenditure. See *Official Report* 2 July 2015.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Porter, (2010), 357.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> See RB Mowatt, *The Diplomatic Relations of Great Britain and the United States* (London: Edward Arnold, 1925); LM Gelber, *The Rise of the Anglo American Friendship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); HC Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo American Relations 1783-1952* ((London: Odhams Press, 1954.
- <sup>xxix</sup> See Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization* 46, 2 Spring 1992.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Walt (1997) 168.

- 
- xxx<sup>i</sup> Robert Jervis, Realism, Neo Liberalism and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate', *International Security* 24:1, Summer 1999, 51-54.
- xxx<sup>ii</sup> William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, 'Reassessing the special relationship', *International Affairs* 85:2 (2009) 264.
- xxx<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., 264.
- xxx<sup>iv</sup> D. Haglund, 'Is there a "strategic culture" of the special relationship,' in *Anglo American Relations: Contemporary Perspectives* edited by A. Dobson and S. Marsh, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 44.
- xxx<sup>v</sup> Ibid.
- xxx<sup>vi</sup> Interview 7 July 2014.
- xxx<sup>vii</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Government Foreign Policy Towards the US*, HC 695, (London: TSO, 2014), 17.
- xxx<sup>viii</sup> See P. DiMaggio and W. Powell, 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields', in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* edited by W. Powell and P. DiMaggio, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), Kindle Edition.
- xxx<sup>ix</sup> Sir John Sawers, *The Iraq Inquiry* 10 December 2009, 67, <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/406682009120amsawers-final.pdf>
- xl See House of Commons Defence Committee 6<sup>th</sup> Report, *Iraq: An Initial Assessment of Post Conflict Operations* HC 65-I, 2004-2005, (London: HMSO, 2005), para.8; and Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, 'Changing the Army for Counter Insurgency Operations', *Military Review* November-December 2005, p.3.
- xli Interviews with Senior British Civil Servant and British Army Officer
- xlii Patrick Cockburn, 'A gross failure that ignored history and ended with a humiliating retreat', *The Independent*, 17 March 2008.
- xliii Warren Chin *Britain and the War on Terror* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 137.
- xliv Interview 28 October 2013.
- xl<sup>v</sup> Only in 2004 did the British agree to deploy a substantial force in the American sector. Eleven soldiers were either killed or wounded in the first week of their deployment by a suicide bomber which led to a heated political debate back in the UK.
- xl<sup>vi</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Seventh Report, *Foreign Policy Aspects of the War Against Terrorism* 2001-2002, (London: HMSO, 2002), p.16.
- xl<sup>vii</sup> Ibid., p.58.
- xl<sup>viii</sup> Ibid., 2002, 18.
- xl<sup>ix</sup> Ibid., Q.36.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> J. Kampfneer, *Blairs Wars* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 146
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid., 129.
- <sup>iii</sup> See C. Rice, 'Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs* January/ February 2000.
- <sup>iiii</sup> Interview with Lt Gen John McColl, 12 November 2014.
- <sup>iv</sup> S. Jones, 'The Future of Insurgency', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 36:1, (2013), 90.
- <sup>lv</sup> T. Franks, *American Soldier* (London: Harper Collins, 2004), Kindle edition, loc 5399.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Interview with Lt Gen McColl 12 November 2014
- <sup>lvii</sup> See for example, J. Record, *Dark Victory: America's Second War Against Iraq*, (Annapolis Md: Naval Institute Press, 2004).
- <sup>lviii</sup> The US promised \$1.1 billion over the same time frame. See Afghanistan News Center, *Aid Pledge Boost for Afghanistan*, 1 February 2006.  
[www.afghanistannewscenter.com/february/feb12006.html](http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/february/feb12006.html)
- <sup>lix</sup> Cimbala and Forster, *Multi National Military Intervention NATO Strategy, Policy and Burden Sharing*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 150.
- <sup>lx</sup> Peter Dahl Thruelson, *NATO In Afghanistan: What Lessons Are We Learning And Are We Willing to Adjust*: Danish Institute for International Studies no.14 2007 p.20.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Cimbala and Forster (2010), 23.
- <sup>lxii</sup> Kim Sengupta, 'British Troops at mercy of Taliban surge', *The Independent* 12 June 2009.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Interview 8 May 2014
- <sup>lxiv</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Government foreign policy towards the United States*, HC 695, (London: TSO, 2014), 13.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Sherrad Cowper Coles, (2009), Chapter 9.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Testimony of Congressman Kirk, *Afghanistan on the Brink Where do We go From Here?* Hearng before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Serial 110-13, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2007), 7.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Cooper Cowles, (2009) Loc 1523
- <sup>lxviii</sup> Ambassador Arnall. '07Netherlands /Afghanistan: Dutch Positive on Counternarcotics Message', 07THEHAGUE2048; Ranjiv Chandraskaran, 'Administration is keeping ally at Arms length', *The Washington Post*, 6 May, 2009
- <sup>lxix</sup> Vanda Felbab Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington, D.C: the Brookling Institute, 2010), 140.
- <sup>lxx</sup> According to Woodward, Richard Holbroke recognised in 2009 that a final political settlement required negotiations with the Taliban, however, no one else in the NSC seemed to recognise this.

---

lxxi C. Coker, 'Between Iraq and a Hard Place: Multi National Cooperation, Afghanistan and Strategic Culture, *RUSI Journal*, 151:5, 2006, 14-19.

lxxii House of Commons Defence Committee, *Operations in Afghanistan*, HC 54(London: TSO, 2011), Q840

lxxiii James. Ferguson, *A Million Bullets* (London: Bantam Press, 2008)124-131

lxxiv , *Ibid.*,165.

lxxv Interview April 2014

lxxvi Interview April 2014

lxxvii House of Commons Defence Committee, *Operations in Afghanistan*, 4th Report, Vol. 1, HC 544 (London: TSO, 2011), p. 45.

lxxviii Interview April 2014

lxxix *Strategic Options for the Way Ahead in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Hearing before the Committee on the Armed Services*, 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (2009) (Statement by Carl Lewin, Chair, Senate Armed Services Committee, 3.

lxxx *Ibid*, statement by Lt Gen (retd) David Barno, 42-43.

lxxxi Only on one occasion in 2004 did the British accede to a request to deploy British troops in the American zone of occupation. In this case it was the Black Watch.

lxxxii Ann Scott Tyler, 'Pentagon Critical of NATO Allies', *The Washington Post* 12 December 2007.

lxxxiii Foreign Affairs Committee, HC 114, (2010), 23.

lxxxiv The Cabinet Office, *UK Policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (London: TSO, 2009).

lxxxv *House of Commons Defence Committee, Operations in Afghanistan* HC 554, (London: TSO,2011),33.

lxxxvi Lt General Stanley McCrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir*, (New York: Penguin, 2013), 294-298.

lxxxvii Interview May 2014

lxxxviii This increased to six with the creation of RC South West

lxxxix S. McCrystal, (2013), 310-12

xc <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070726/wmstext/70726m0002.htm#07072644000005>

xci House of Commons Defence Committee, HC 554 (2011), Q93.

xcii Interview May 2014.

xciii Interview April 2014.

xciv HCDC HC 554, (2011), Q240.

---

<sup>xcv</sup> RC South West was created in June 2010. The surge of forces into southern Afghanistan made it necessary to create a further divisional headquarters to manage the command frictions.

<sup>xcvi</sup>

<sup>xcvii</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Afghanistan: how the US army battled it out with the British', *The Guardian* 3 July 2012.

<sup>xcviii</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekraran, 'US Marines, British advisors at odds in Helmand', *The Washington Post* 4 September 2010.

<sup>xcix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>c</sup> Interview September 2014

<sup>ci</sup> There were 400 staff in the headquarters in total of which 82 were British.

<sup>cii</sup> Interview September 2014

<sup>ciii</sup> See General Albert Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports* (New York, 1958), 167.

<sup>civ</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Government foreign policy towards the United States, HC 695, (London: TSO, 2014), 13

<sup>cv</sup> Elizabeth Rigby, 'UK faces pressure to commit to NATO target', *Financial Times*, 21 June, 2015.

<sup>cvi</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan, (London, TSO, 2011), para 115.

<sup>cvi</sup> Cowper-Cowles, (2009), Kindle, Loc 4764